



# **Whistleblowing Policy**

**September 2019**

This Policy applies to all employees employed by HCT Group companies.

## **1. Aims of this Policy**

**1.1.** An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable staff and other members of the Company to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner. It is a fundamental term of every contract of employment that an employee will faithfully serve his or her employer and not disclose confidential information about the employer's affairs. Nevertheless, where an individual discovers information which they believe shows serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation then this information should be disclosed internally without fear of reprisal, and there should be arrangements to enable this to be done independently of line management (although in relatively minor instances the line manager would be the appropriate person to be told).

**1.2** The Public Interest Disclosure Act, which came into effect in 1999, gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. The Company has endorsed the provisions set out below so as to ensure that no members of staff should feel at a disadvantage in raising legitimate concerns.

**1.3** It should be emphasised that this policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by the Company nor should it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures. Once the "whistleblowing" procedures are in place, it is reasonable to expect staff to use them rather than air their complaints outside the Company.

## **2. Who is covered by the policy**

**2.1.** This policy covers all individuals working at all levels and grades, and are collectively referred to as staff in this policy.

## **3. The scope of the policy**

**3.1.** This policy is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest and may at least initially be investigated separately but might then lead to other procedures e.g. disciplinary. These concerns could include:

- Financial malpractice or impropriety or fraud
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or Statutes
- Dangers to Health & Safety or the environment

- Criminal activity
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to conceal any of these

#### **4. Protection**

4.1 This policy is designed to offer protection to those employees of the Company who disclose such concerns provided the disclosure is made; in good faith or in the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it tends to show malpractice or impropriety and if they make the disclosure to an appropriate person (see below).

4.2 It is important to note that no protection from internal disciplinary procedures is offered to those who choose not to use the procedure. In an extreme case malicious or wild allegations could give rise to legal action on the part of the persons complained about.

4.3 Disclosing information in an inappropriate way (eg contacting the media) could result in disciplinary action being taken against the individual, which could include dismissal.

#### **4. Confidentiality**

4.1. The organisation will treat all such disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner. The identity of the employee making the allegation may be kept confidential so long as it does not hinder or frustrate any investigation. However, the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and the individual making the disclosure may need to provide a statement as part of the evidence required.

#### **5. Untrue Allegations**

5.1. If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. In making a disclosure the individual should exercise due care to ensure the accuracy of the information. If, however, an individual makes malicious or vexatious allegations, and particularly if he or she persists with making them, disciplinary action may be taken against that individual.

#### **6. Internal Procedure**

6.1. If an employee has a concern, they should first raise it with their line manager, verbally or in writing. If they feel that this person may be involved or do not wish to approach them, then they should approach their line manager's senior manager.

6.2 If the employee feels a senior manager may be involved, the employee should report the matter to the HR Department.

**6.3** The organisation will ensure that an investigation takes place and make an objective assessment of the concern. This may involve referring to the company disciplinary procedure or grievance procedure. The employee will be kept advised of progress and the organisation will ensure the action necessary to resolve the concern is taken.

**6.4** In all cases, the employee is encouraged to exhaust HCT's internal procedures before contacting external bodies.

## **7. Alerting outside bodies to a potential wrongdoing**

7.1 An individual should always follow the procedure above in section 6. If the individual is not satisfied with the response, he or she is entitled to contact a relevant external body to express the concerns. In doing this the individual should:

- have a reasonable belief that the allegation is based on correct facts
- make the disclosure to a relevant body
- have a reasonable belief it is in the public interest to make the disclosure.

7.2 A "relevant body" is likely to be a regulatory body (eg the Health and Safety Executive, or the Financial Services Authority).

## **7. Contacting the media**

7.1 The media is not a relevant external body. Individuals should not contact the media with allegations about the organisation, except in extraordinary circumstances where neither the organisation nor the relevant regulatory body would be appropriate. Disclosing information in an inappropriate way (eg contacting the media) could result in disciplinary action being taken against the individual, which could include dismissal.

**Next review date September 2020**